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ABSTRACT

This brief paper reports on the results of the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment in U.S. history for grades 4, 8, and 12. The themes addressed in the assessment were intended to ensure that all major branches of historical study were covered and that emphasis on various areas was balanced. Themes include: (1) "Changes and Continuity in American Democracy: Ideas, Institutions, Practices, and Controversies"; (2) "The Gathering and Interaction of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas"; (3) "Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relation to Society, Ideas, and the Environment"; and (4) "The Changing Role of America in the World." Student performance is summarized on the NAEP U.S. history scale with ranges from 0 to 500 and achievement levels of Basic, Proficient and Advanced. Major findings include: (1) The average score of students in grade 4 was 205, in grade 8 was 259, and in grade 12 was 286; (2) The Proficient achievement level was reached by only 17 percent of fourth graders, 14 percent of eighth graders, and 11 percent of twelfth graders; (3) Fewer than half the grade 12 students in the assessment were able to reach the Basic level, while grades 4 and 8 had over 60 percent of assessed students performing at this level; and (4) On individual assessment tasks, students demonstrated a range of competencies. Samples of competencies and performance tasks are included. (EH)

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Results From The

NAEP 1994 U.S. History Assessment

— At A Glance

Knowledge of United States history is an important component of effective citizenship. A thorough grasp of our country's struggles, successes, and failures, and the skills to interpret them, better enables young people to make informed and intelligent decisions about contemporary issues. Nourishing the curiosity children exhibit about major events, customs, and institutions, and the families and individuals that comprise United States history, creates a valuable resource for our nation's future.

To assess the current level of United States history knowledge, the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessed United States history at grades 4, 8, and 12. The assessment probed students' abilities to recall, understand, analyze, and interpret the broad field of United States history. As the nation's foremost ongoing educational survey, NAEP results track trends in students' performance, and allow concerned readers to evaluate whether our nation's children are developing the history skills and knowledge essential for effective participation in the economy and the polity. The highlights of this extensive, innovative assessment are presented in the following pages. (More detailed results can be found in other NAEP reports about the U.S. history assessment. Information on how to obtain these reports is found on the last page of this brochure.)

The structure and content of the U.S. history assessment were guided by a comprehensive framework or blueprint developed under the direction of the National Assessment Governing Board. Four historical themes served as the core organizing structure of the assessment. The themes, listed below, were intended to ensure that all major branches of historical study were covered and that emphasis on various areas was balanced.

- Changes and Continuity in American Democracy: Ideas, Institutions, Practices, and Controversies
- The Gathering and Interaction of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas
- Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relation to Society, Ideas, and the Environment
- The Changing Role of America in the World

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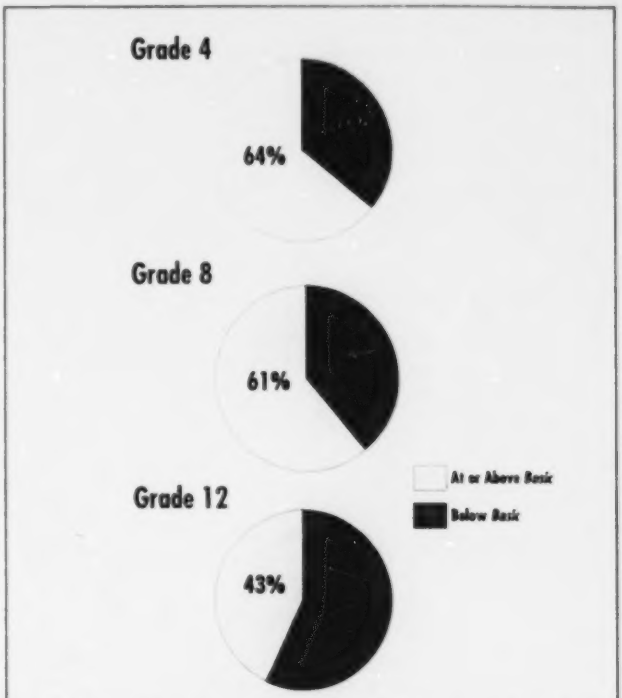
Student performance is summarized on the NAEP U.S. history scale, which ranges from 0 to 500. In addition, results for each grade are reported according to three achievement levels: *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*. These achievement levels are based on judgments about what students should know and be able to do in United States history. The *Basic* level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade. The *Proficient* level represents solid academic performance and demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter. The *Advanced* level signifies superior performance.

It should be noted that the setting of achievement levels on NAEP is relatively new and in transition. However, those responsible for NAEP also believe that the achievement levels are useful and valuable in reporting on the educational achievement of the nation's students.

Major Findings for the Nation

- The average score of students in grade 4 was 205. The bottom 10 percent of the population scored at or below 147, and the top 10 percent scored at or above 253.
- At grade 8, the average score was 259. The bottom 10 percent of the population scored at or below 217, and the top 10 percent scored at or above 299.
- The average score of students in grade 12 was 286. The bottom 10 percent scored at or below 243, and the top 10 percent scored at or above 326.
- The *Proficient* achievement level was reached by only 17 percent of fourth graders, 14 percent of eighth graders, and 11 percent of twelfth graders.
- Fewer than half the grade 12 students in the assessment were able to reach the *Basic* level. At grades 4 and 8, over 60 percent of assessed students demonstrated this level of performance.

Figure 1 Percentage of Students At or Above the Basic Achievement Level in U.S. History



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1994 U.S. History Assessment.

- On individual assessment tasks, students demonstrated a range of competencies. For example:
  - At grade 4, 87 percent of assessed students correctly identified Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have A Dream" speech; 45 percent identified the primary purpose of the Bill of Rights (see below); 32 percent knew that New York was one of the colonies that took part in the American Revolution; and 11 percent described some ways in which women's roles in the workforce have changed over the past 100 years.

What is the purpose of the Bill of Rights?

A To say how much Americans should pay in taxes

B To protect freedoms like freedom of speech

C To describe the jobs of the President and Congress

D To make Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States

Answer: B

- At grade 8, 80 percent of the students knew that the song "O Freedom" was used by people in the Civil Rights movement (see below); 71 percent identified Thomas Jefferson as the author of the Declaration of Independence; 41 percent associated the Lend-Lease Act, the Yalta Conference, and the dropping of the atomic bomb with the Second World War; and 10 percent wrote a description of the debate at the Constitutional Convention that led to the Connecticut Compromise.

O Freedom!
O Freedom!
O Freedom over me!
And before I'd be a slave,
I'd be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free!

The song was associated with

A the temperance movement

B the civil rights movement

C pioneers on the Oregon Trail

D farmers in the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression

Answer: B

- At grade 12, 74 percent of the students determined the effect of the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite on United States politics; 41 percent identified the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine (see below); 29 percent explained the effect of an economic or technological change on the nature of farming in America; and 22 percent successfully compared Franklin Roosevelt's 1933 and 1937 inauguration speeches.

The Monroe Doctrine was intended to

A promote United States trade with China

B help keep the peace in Europe

C discourage European involvement in the Americas

D protect United States business in Japan and Korea

Answer: C

The assessment included both multiple-choice questions, such as those shown above, and constructed-response questions. Constructed-response questions required students to write responses of as little as a few sentences, or as much as a few paragraphs. For example, the question shown below was given to students at grades 8 and 12. Some credit was awarded for student responses that were only partially correct. Sixteen percent of eighth graders and 35 percent of twelfth graders received full credit for their responses.

There's a long, long trail a-winding

Bruce Shanks in the Buffalo News

Circle the decade in which you believe this cartoon was drawn.

1920's 1940's 1960's 1980's

Citing specific historical evidence, explain why you chose the decade you did.

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Major Findings for Student Subgroups

- As has been the case in other NAEP assessments, there were statistically significant differences in the performance of major subgroups of the population. For example, at all grades White and Asian students had higher scores than did their Black and Hispanic counterparts.
- Consistent with findings in other NAEP assessments, there was a strong relationship between differing levels of parental education and performance on the NAEP U.S. history assessment. As a general rule, the more education students reported that their parents had received, the better the students performed on the assessment.
- On the NAEP U.S. history scale, there were no statistically significant performance differences between male and female students at grades 4 and 8. At grade 12, male students performed at a higher level than females.
- At all three grades, students attending nonpublic schools performed at a higher level than did students attending public schools.

Contextual Factors Related to United States History Performance

A diverse range of home and school factors influence the ways and extent to which students learn history. Students who participated in the NAEP assessment were asked to complete questionnaires about their home and school experiences related to history learning. Also, teachers completed questionnaires about their students' instructional experiences. The results of these surveys help provide a context for interpreting the assessment scores, and provide policymakers with information about variables that are positively and negatively related to history achievement.

- Over 40 percent of the students at grades 4 and 8, and 25 percent of the students at grade 12, reported watching four or more hours of television each day. In most cases, the more television students reported watching the worse they performed on the U.S. history assessment.
- Fifty-four percent of the fourth graders, 38 percent of the eighth graders, and 31 percent of the twelfth graders reported discussing their studies at home daily. By contrast, 18, 22, and 25 percent of the students at each grade, respectively, reported never or hardly ever discussing their studies. Students who reported no regular discussions had lower average scale scores than all other students.
- United States history instruction was limited for grade 4 students. Only 7 percent of the fourth graders assessed had teachers who reported that United States history was the focus of their social studies teaching. Conversely, most students in grade 8 were taking a course in United States history, and most twelfth graders had taken such a course in grade 11.
- History homework was limited at grade 8. Forty-eight percent of students who were taking U.S. history reported that they did one-half hour or less of history homework each week. These students had lower scores on the assessment than did students who did one or two hours of homework each week.
- Almost half the students had teachers who reported using textbooks on a daily basis. Also, 62 percent of the students at grade 4 and 23 percent of the students at grade 8 had teachers who reported that they never or hardly ever use primary historical documents in their teaching.

For More Information . . .

More complete results of the NAEP 1994 U.S. history assessment are available in two National Center of Education Statistics publications:

NAEP 1994 U.S. History: A First Look

NAEP 1994 U.S. History Report Card

The *First Look* highlights the overall and demographic results, while the *Report Card* is a more extensive treatment of the findings and includes discussions of contextual factors that are related to history performance.

For ordering information on these reports, write:

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